

To:

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Please ask for: Gail Hancock

Phone: 01452 425775

Our Ref: GH/jp

Date: 19th November 2021

Dear Colleagues

Re: Public Law Outline Update – Legal Planning, Advice and Guidance

I hope you are managing to keep well and look after yourself at a time when I appreciate everyone is continuing to work really hard with the level of complexity and demand in the system at the moment. Before I move on to address developments about legal planning, advice and guidance, I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for your continuing commitment to support vulnerable children and young people in Gloucestershire.

I am writing to update you on progress and significant developments in our pre-proceedings and care proceedings work under the public law outline (PLO), and some other developments relating to legal matters.

In terms of the overall position, I'll start with the progress we have all made to date in ensuring there is management 'grip and pace' in decision-making for our most vulnerable children. You'll remember that in their October 2020 focused visit, Ofsted reported the following:

- The service fails to make best use of the PLO and to track pre-proceedings effectively, which leads to drift and delay for some children.
- Pre-proceedings are not used effectively enough to promote change. This leaves some children living in risky situations for longer than they should and leads to delays in achieving permanence for others.
- Ofsted acknowledged that CV19 had exacerbated the problem, but noted it was an issue identified in the 2017 inspection as well.
- The need to get better in this area of our work was one of four areas of improvement that Ofsted identified.

In response, we implemented a recovery plan. Table 1 below shows the elements of that plan and our progress. Since developing that plan we have agreed and implemented further measures to strengthen our work for children under the PLO. Table 2 below shows how we're doing with those measures.

I hope you'll agree these tables show we've made good progress, and that the way we now use legal processes supports effective social work practice, prevents delay and helps achieve the best outcomes for children.

1.	Proceed with appointments of case progression manager and business & administration officer.	This is fully achieved.
2.	Heads of Service to chair LPMs for their own Locality.	Achieved November 2020.

3.	Urgently reinstate monthly pre-proceedings reviews by the Case Progression Managers in each Locality.	Achieved November 2020.
4.	Refresh the Liquidlogic PLO pre-proceedings tracker with updated information at monthly reviews completed by the case progression managers in each locality.	Achieved November 2020.
5.	Introduce new monthly Assistant Director overview meetings with Heads of Service, Case Progression Managers and Legal Services to establish a whole service position and report and target any remedial action that is required.	Achieved November 2020. These now involve monthly overviews by an independent Improvement Consultant and Legal advisers no longer attend as this was found to be unnecessary given their input into the LPMs.
6.	Establish quarterly Director (Children's Safeguarding & Care) PLO scrutiny meetings with Legal Services to establish the overarching position and any remedial action that is required, including consideration of specialist assessments to be completed in pre-proceedings or in court care proceedings.	Achieved October 2020. Monthly leadership reports and meetings in place.
7.	Establish reporting by the Director (Children's Safeguarding & Care) to the strategic performance meeting	Achieved June 2021.

Table 2

1.	Review and relaunch of the PLO protocol. Paperwork and evidence to be strengthened with robust QA in place. New SW PLO Summary document introduced. New LPM Agenda and Minute template developed and to be built in LCS.	Achieved April 2021.
2.	Care proceedings tracker to be built to replace the three-tier trackers used as part of our court recovery plan.	Achieved May 2021.
3.	A monthly Court Recovery Report is prepared for Children's Services Leadership Team meeting. This details progress for all children subject to pre and care proceedings to ensure that the appropriate oversight is maintained for these children.	Achieved and on-going.
4.	Make the necessary changes and improvements to the Liquidlogic legal workspace.	This has mostly been achieved and performance data reports are now run from this area of the system. Some further development continues.
5.	The 2021 national Public Law Working Group (PLWG) report includes many recommendations and sets out best practice guidance which we need to develop at a locally.	We are making good progress in responding to the recommendations. For example, we have introduced new Social Work Evidence Templates (SWETs) which are now in use across the county. We continue to work on other recommendations with our Legal Service colleagues.
6.	Improved chronologies.	We have developed a new webinar that will be recorded by our

		Ambassadors and delivered in your teams by your Head of Service. This will include the development of impact chronologies.
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New developments

I'll now move on to tell you about our new developments.

Pre-proceedings timescales

In line with the PLWG recommendations, we're changing our previous 26-week pre-proceedings timeline. With immediate effect, this will change to 16 weeks. This is a national requirement and is in line with other local authorities in our region. We've amended the Legal Planning Meeting Protocol (attached to this email), replacing in Appendix 2 the previous 26-week timeline with the new 16-week schedule.

This will require a shift in culture and practice for all of us. To achieve the new 16-week timeline, we will need to ensure that more assessments and services are delivered under child protection plans. We've worked with those colleagues who chair child protection conferences to help them prepare for and respond to this shift. As part of that work they have developed new standards for effective child protection planning which we've added to the attached Legal Planning Meeting Protocol (Appendix 4).

Legal advice on matters not covered by LPMs

In response to feedback from social workers and managers about the need for a clearer framework for securing legal advice on matters not covered by LPMs we are introducing Legal Advice Meetings (LAMs). These are explained in a new document, Legal Advice Meeting Protocol (also attached). This follows the format of the Legal Planning Meeting Protocol and you will see many similarities. This is entirely deliberate and is aimed at providing you with consistent and straightforward processes and expectations. It applies with immediate effect. This document sets out arrangements for obtaining formal legal opinion about:

- Secure Accommodation Orders
- Recovery Orders
- Deprivation of Liberty Standards (DOLS)
- Termination of Placement with Parent Regulations, variation or termination of contact where there is a Care Order (not ICO as contact is considered as part of the proceedings).
- Requests to be joined in any other proceedings as a party, for example when GCC is designated by the court in another local authority's proceedings.

Liquidlogic changes

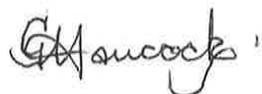
To support you in presenting to LPMs and LAMs we've introduced two closely related templates: the PLO social work summary report (which you'll already be familiar with); and the LAM social work summary report. I'm pleased to let you know that these are both now live in Liquidlogic and can be accessed in the new form section of children's records.

And finally, please do take some time to look at the protocols and acquaint yourself with the new templates in Liquidlogic. Please discuss this development with your colleagues and raise it in your team meetings and supervision sessions. If you have any questions or queries please contact Julie Miles, Head of Service, or Katie Wint and Cheryl Lodge, our Legal Case Progressions Managers, who will be happy to assist.

I hope you will forgive the length of this communication as there are a lot of details to cover. I think it's important to acknowledge and appreciate the many and varied developments and improvements that have been made, and are continuing to be made, in respect of PLO pre and care proceedings. Many staff have

contributed to the progress that has been made and many more of you are engaged in pre and court proceedings to implement the changes in practice. I believe that by promoting these changes we will continue to strengthen our everyday practice so that it is consistently good and better for all children, every time. This is essential if we are going to have a positive impact and deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children in Gloucestershire. Thank you once again for everything you do, it is very much appreciated.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Hancock', with a small mark at the end.

Gail Hancock
Interim Director for Children's Safeguarding and Care

Encl: Legal Planning Meeting Protocol
Legal Advice Meeting Protocol